

Franck Cousserans - General Manager France & Belgium, Jazz Pharmaceuticals



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Franck Cousserans, general manager of France and Belgium at Jazz Pharmaceuticals, highlights the company's key products and the challenges of market access in France. Furthermore, he indicates the steps needed to grow in the future and how Jazz's corporate culture is key to its success.

What attracted you to working at Jazz Pharmaceuticals after many years working in Big Pharma?

I was attracted at first to the unique nature of the company. Jazz Pharmaceuticals is a global biopharmaceutical company that was founded in 2003 in the US to commercialize products that addressed unmet medical needs within the patient community, mostly within the field of rare diseases. We are fully dedicated to developing life-changing medicines for people with limited or no options. We started with one product, Xyrem® (sodium oxybate), and the company has grown at a very fast pace up to today. We are now a leader in sleep medicine, and we have a growing haematology/oncology portfolio.

In fact, over the last few years the growth we have experienced is staggering. In 2018, the company globally achieved sales of USD 1.9 billion, a 17 percent growth over 2017, and in 2019 we expect to reach USD 2.1 billion, a 12 percent growth trajectory. The company is headquartered in Dublin, Ireland, we globally have around 1250 employees and operate or partner to make our

medicines available to patients in over 90 countries within the company's two fields of expertise: sleep disorders and haematology/oncology.

In France we are focused on four treatments in haematology/oncology. Defitelio® (defibrotide) is our leading therapy, which treats liver complications in stem cell transplants that are fatal in 80 percent of patients. Vyxeos® (daunorubicin and cytarabine) is our second product and a real game changer. For 40 years, acute myeloid leukaemia had been treated in the same way, but with our formulation that takes into account a fixed ratio of two compounds, we have been able to significantly improve the efficacy and overall survival of patients over the standard care.

Our final two products, Kidrolase® (L-asparaginase) and Erwinaze® (asparaginase Erwinia chrysanthemi) are used to treat acute lymphoblastic leukaemia.

In the near future, Jazz is looking forward to bringing Sunosi™ (solriamfetol), a potential treatment for excessive daytime sleepiness associated with narcolepsy or obstructive sleep apnea, to patients in Europe. Sunosi™ received FDA approval in March, and in the US, Jazz is already known for its leadership in sleep medicine. It is our expertise here that we will be bringing to France and our other European markets as we expand globally into this therapeutic area. We are hence now building our competencies in this area and founding a new team in France. This is an exciting challenge for us, and we are looking forward to it.

What have been your major priorities since taking over as general manager almost 3 years ago now?

In France we have been focused on building team spirit and creating a stable organization with a solid foundation. We now are a team of around 40 people, and with the growth of the sleep medicine team, we will continue to evolve and grow our numbers.

Equally, we have focused on building awareness within our key therapeutic areas with physicians. As we are dealing with a small number of patients in which the disease can be hidden in many cases, we aim to build awareness, so doctors are aware of such conditions. To do this, we work with key centres and experts in France and are very strong in the company's clinical research programs.

How strategically important is France for Jazz Pharmaceuticals in Europe?

We are the leading market in terms of sales and team, and our footprint will continue to increase over the upcoming months with the introduction of Jazz Pharmaceutical's first sleep medicine team in our offices. France is renowned for its world-class KOLs and excellent clinical setting. We collaborate with leading centres and experts within our fields, such as acute myeloid leukaemia, which positions France as a very strategic market to the group.

What is your assessment of the ease and speed of market access in France?

France is without a doubt a complex market, though all of our products are benefiting from the Early Access Program - the ATU System (Autorisations temporaires d'utilisation) which delivers quick market access to certain therapies. It is undeniably a key strength of France that is envied by many of my counterparts in other countries. It is clear that patients benefit from this quicker access, and it is key they receive such treatments and we do not just get 'approval'. Access to patients prevails over a simple authorization. At the end of the day, if we have a life-changing drug, patients must receive it or there is no point in such a therapy. Furthermore, with French regulations, we are able to get quick approval of new indications, and we hope this fluid system of market approval remains in the future as it makes France a very attractive market for companies like Jazz Pharmaceuticals active in rare diseases.

Nevertheless, the pricing negotiations in France are tough. I fully acknowledge that in markets like France, where drugs are financed by a national payer, there has to be some kind of rationale and reasoning on pricing. It must be done in a way where patients receive the correct treatments while ensuring the sustainability of the whole system. This at times makes it difficult, and products are rejected, but if you look at the bigger picture, the authorities are doing this for the reason of long-term sustainability of French healthcare.

The discussions held between the French authorities and industry during the July 2018 Strategic Council of Health Industries (CSIS) have been perceived by many as 'very positive', yet there seems to be a gap with the October Social Security financial bill (PLFSS). What is your take on this?

From what I have seen and discussed with the LEEM (the pharmaceutical industry's association in France), the strong assets of the French system that we currently use will continue, and we will as a pharmaceutical community aim to facilitate more innovation in the future, which is great for us.

Some of the key announcements included the extension of ATUs to other indications, which would make France an even more attractive launch market for highly innovative products.

Nevertheless, the reality of such negotiations has yet to arrive, and we are waiting for action to take place. Only time will tell to be honest.

Where do you see competition coming from?

We are working in areas of unmet medical needs, so really there does not exist a real direct competitor. In oncohaematology, companies are entering the game, and we welcome this to advance the therapies for patients, while in sleep disorders we are truly uniquely positioned.

According to your global CEO, Bruce Cozadd, Jazz Pharma's annual R&D spend is some USD 200 million (equating to roughly 12% of revenue). To what extent are you harnessing France's strong clinical trials infrastructure to perform R&D activities?

The company will only continue to grow on R&D investment in the future as our revenues increase. This is the strategic direction of our CEO. This will not only be in-house through our US based R&D center, but through partnerships and purchase of molecules at different stages of development. These advancements are a reflection of our continued investment in an evolving and growing R&D focus.

The French affiliate of Jazz Pharmaceuticals is based out of Lyon, one of France's great life sciences ecosystem but also a rather competitive region to attract talents. How do you differentiate yourself to attract staff to work at Jazz Pharmaceuticals?

You are right, it is a competitive region, though we have been very successful in attracting staff with an excellent pool of varied expertise, employing people such as scientists, pharmacists, doctors and business school graduates. Moreover, many of them are coming over from the world of Big pharma, and this proved that a good strategy and special products can bring the right people that feel proud about their work.

Jazz Pharmaceuticals' products are truly game-changing for patients. Hence there is a sense of great pride in our daily work. This mission drives us and enables us to attract the right talents.

Your company shares its name with a style of music that embraces improvisation but also cohesion. How would you describe the 'distinctive' corporate culture and ethos of Jazz Pharmaceuticals?

Everything we do at Jazz is focused on three things: putting patients first, being a great place to work, and living our shared values. Like the musicians who inspired our name, we use a combination of structured improvisation, collaboration and personal excellence to bring real value to patients. We find flexibility in diverse ideas and understand that when great talents come together in a setting like this, anything is possible - especially changing lives.

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